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Gendered Economic Strategies: Division of Labour, Responsibilities and Controls Within Households in Nyeri County, Kenya

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Abstract

In Central Highlands, Nyeri County, Kenya, the majority of people derive their daily livelihoods from agricultural activities. However, the sector exhibits distinct gendered asymmetries, which exist in regards to responsibilities, controls and tasks, both within and outside of the farm. Recently, with the reformation of the Kenyan Constitution in 2010, formal steps have been made to ensure a higher degree of gender equality. Nonetheless, land ownership and formal income generating activities are still prevalingly associated with men. In this study, we investigate the interrelation of gender roles and agricultural production analysed through the lens of Feminist Political Ecology. The objective of this paper is to link findings in division of labour among sexes with gendered household economics, which were collected during our fieldwork in Nyeri County. The focus of this analysis will be placed on household economics and hence we seek to expand the understanding of how formal and informal institutions affect gendered relations and accesses to different sorts of resources. Furthermore, we attempt to link our findings of women’s active participation in self-help groups as well as their inclination towards keeping separate economic accounts with the concept of agency. Our analysis suggests that the gendered division of labour together with perceptions of crops and livestock as being associated with either men or women constitute the current asymmetrical gender structures. Men and women’s separate agricultural activities, responsibilities and controls create different domains of knowledge, which constitute their different positions within the household and the farm. Consequently, men and women adopt different economic strategies and hence, use separate economic systems. We argue that women keep private savings, a practice passed on from mother to daughter, and engage in self-help groups, in a traditional “*Harambee*” spirit, in order to strengthen their agency and room for manoeuvre within societal structures. Moreover, we assert that these practices exhibit ways to get access into formal economic domains such as banks, otherwise primarily accessible by men.

Keywords: Agency, gender, household economics, Kenya